Talbot County Tourism Board
Meeting Minutes

Sept. 9, 2026
Talbot County Free Library
100 W. Dover St. Easton, MD

I. Welcome and Call to Order

Chairman Bixler called the meeting to order at 8:43 a.m. and welcomed members and guests.

Members Present: Judy Bixler, Harold Klinger, Amy Kreiner, Eric Levinson, Mark Salter, and Jeff Schneider

Members Absent: Chris Agharabi, Jessica Bellis, Jennifer Brown, Maureen Curry, Keasha Haythe, Kristen Greenaway, Patricia McGlannan, Katrina Whittington

Staff: Clay Stamp, Stephanie Mervine, Kristen Goller, and Ellie Mertaugh

County Manager Clay Stamp welcomed the new Director of Economic Development and Tourism, Stephanie Murvine, and recognized director Cassandra Vanhooser's contributions and Kristen Goller's efforts during the transition. The meeting also welcomed Ellie Murtaugh, who joined in a part-time capacity to focus on tourism.

II. Talbot County Council Report – Clay Stamp

Mr. Stamp provided a brief report since Ms. Haythe was unable to attend. He noted that the current council is finishing up their four-year term, and they should be commended for their accomplishments. They've focused their efforts around the 3P strategy: personnel, processes, and projects. In their final year, this council brought several projects to completion. They've worked hard, and this board was a part of that success. As their terms end, we have an election approaching, and we'll have a new council moving forward.

III. Department Report – Stephanie Mervine and Kristen Goller

Summer Highlights

The department renewed its partnership with Plein Air Easton to further their out-of-market advertising reach. The campaign was a success, with all partners renewing for 2027.

Supported through grant funding, a photo shoot with Destination by Design took place in July covering a wide range of locations. Several local contacts served as models, and many local businesses supported the effort. Images are currently being processed.

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The Tourism Manager attended the Maryland Association of Counties (MACO) Conference in Ocean City and the US Travel's Educational Seminar for Tourism Organizations (ESTO) Conference in Philadelphia. The county has not attended this conference in the past, but its drive distance location made it possible. The conference focuses on developing industry trends and best practices.

On Sept. 3, the county, working in partnership with the Stories of the Chesapeake Heritage Area, Talbot 250, Maryland 250, and Preservation Maryland dedicated a Liberty Tree at the Frederick Douglass Park on the Tuckahoe. This was part of a statewide initiative, in which each Maryland county received a tree.

A Look Ahead

Owned and Paid Media

Development of the 2027-28 Talbot County Travel Guide is progressing. Advertising sales, through APG have closed. The current focus is on content creation and image selection.

The department is readying for Fall, transitioning its paid and owned media focus away from summer. Content for fall festivals, including the Waterfowl Festival is being updated. Advertising is shifting to focus on the festivals, fall foliage, family-friendly activities, and the winter holidays.

Earned Media

The department continues to field media inquiries and track media mentions. Earlier this summer, Ken Perotte was hosted, as he was writing a feature in Military Officers Magazine on the War of 1812. Support was lent to a writer who worked with Jay Fleming to cover the Log Canoe Races in Oxford. The State's Office of Tourism Development visited for a FAM tour in early June. A compilation of coverage received, some of which was secured by the public relations efforts of local partners includes PBS.org, AARP the Magazine, Alexandria Living, Washingtonian, Baltimore Business Journal, and Bethesda Magazine.

Moving forward, the department is readying to attend the Mid-Atlantic Tourism PR Alliance Marketplace, which is scheduled for Sept. 22-24 in Delaware. Prior to marketplace, the county is hosting four journalists for a FAM tour.

Interpretive Signs

The county is supporting the efforts of the Talbot Watermen's Association as they undertake a project to erect interpretive signs at public water access points, including Bellevue and Neavitt. Complementary work is ongoing with stakeholders on Tilghman Island to replace dated signs at Dogwood Harbor. This project is being funded through the Chesapeake Gateways Network.

Partnerships

Considering the department's leadership transition, outreach was started over the summer and will continue this fall. Regular meetings are being held with Discover Easton. Introductory meetings took place with St. Michaels Tourism board chair Brian Ball and their marketing liaison. An introduction was also made to the St. Micheals Business Association. Additional outreach is planned for this Fall.

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Bike and Pedestrian Advisory Commission

The commission met over the summer and is working through the acceptance process for a Federal Safe Streets for All Grant. This will allow the county to develop a bike and pedestrian safety action plan.

Frederick Douglass Park on the Tuckahoe Commission

Leadership of the commission has transitioned to the Parks and Recreation Director, but the Tourism Manager has joined the commission and will continue to play an active role. The commission is finalizing design files with Design Minds for the interpretive panels planned for the park. Bid documents will be readied for the two overlooks.

Chesapeake Country All-American Road
Work has continued to develop the Chesapeake Country All-American Road. Over the summer, partners worked with D3 Corp out of Ocean City to capture videos for promotional videos. These are in development and should be ready in the coming weeks. Conservation by Design, who developed the original interpretive plan for the byway was awarded the RFP to develop byway hubs. Partners have received the 100% design drafts, and the hubs will be in production shortly. Each county will receive a hub, and Talbot County's will be installed at the Talbot County Community Center.

Upcoming Events:

Maryland Motorcoach Group Travel Leader Showcase Sept. 28-29, 2026
Maryland Outdoor Recreation Conference Sept. 29-30, 2026
Main Street Maryland Oct. 6

VI. Town Reports

Town representatives reported on news and events taking place in their jurisdictions.

IX. Upcoming Meetings

- Nov. 4 (moved due to Veteran's Day)
- April 29 Save the Date: Business Appreciation Summit

X. Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 9:22 a.m., motioned by Mr. Schneider and seconded by Ms. Kreiner.

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